

Creative Writing 20/30  
Short Story Unit

What defines a short story? Is it simply a short novel? What's the difference between a short story and a novella? Perhaps nothing is as daunting as reading any of the very fine books on writing and then trying to reconcile exactly what a short story is. Most writers, editors, and publishers categorize a short story as a work of fiction comprised of several thousand words, but generally not more than 5 000. Here's what some sources have to say:

"A short piece of prose fiction having few characters and aiming at unity of effect."

– *The American Heritage Dictionary*

"A shaft driven straight into the heart of human experience."

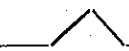
- *Edith Wharton*

"An account of a character struggling to reach a goal."

- *Steven Schoen*

"A dramatic event that involves a person because he is a person, and a particular person – that is, because he shares in the general human condition and in some specific human situation"

- *Flannery O'Connor*

Many people rely on Aristotle's traditional definition that the short story must have a beginning, middle, and end (the traditional  model). Other definitions center on Edgar Allan Poe's theory that a story must have "a certain unique or single effect" and be readable in one sitting, "a half hour to one or two hours in its perusal."

So what could a working definition be for us, in this class? Put your definition in the space provided below.

## **Unit Overview:**

It is important that you are exposed to the various elements of short stories in order to internalize and apply the knowledge you gain into your own reading and writing. As such, we will review the basic elements of short stories (groan), look at some examples of short stories, and work on exercises and activities geared towards developing ideas for creating stories.

## **Unit Assignments:**

### *Journal Writing*

You will be expected to briefly respond in your journal after reading specific short stories. You can record your reactions to the readings, no matter what they are. These journals will be taken in at the end of the unit, along with your final short story, for evaluation.

### *Idea Book:*

Every now and then, I will give you a small activity to work on in your idea book. I will collect your idea books at the end of this unit along with everything else for evaluation (and don't worry about grammar, spelling, and stuff like that for your idea book – it's an idea book, for crying out loud! As long as you complete the prompts, you'll be good ☺)

### *In-Class writing assignments*

Throughout the unit, there will be a number of short in-class writing assignments. They will be started during class time, and can be completed at home. All of these writing assignments will go into your writing folder and submitted at the end of the unit along with your journal and final short story. **You will choose 2 of these writing assignments to polish and submit for marks.**

### *Short Story Assignments:*

1. Flash Fiction stories – you will compose 3 very short stories (maximum 250 words each) and choose one to polish and submit for marks. More on this assignment later!
2. Write a short story between 500 and 1000 words (2-4 typed, double-spaced, pages). You can write a narrative story about whatever you want – it's your choice. You would be well advised to start your narrative as soon as possible as we will be taking part in a short story workshop in the middle of this unit. You will be asked to bring your rough draft to class so that your conference partners can edit your work. Your story will be evaluated using the following rubric.

## Rubric for Short Story Assignment:

	Not Quite There 1	Getting There 2	Meets Expectations 3	Exceeds Expectations 4	Score
<b>Content</b>	Overly simplistic No clear controlling idea and/or theme	Story elements may or may not reveal a controlling idea/theme	Combines story elements around a controlling idea to reveal a thought-provoking theme	Skilfully combines all story elements around a controlling idea to reveal a thought provoking theme	
<b>Plot and Situation</b>	Lacks a developed plot line	Provides a minimally developed plot line	Develops a standard plot line with complex major and minor characters and a definite setting	Skilfully develops plot line with complex major and (if applicable) minor characters and a definite setting	
<b>Narrative Devices/ Story Details</b>	Fails to use details, dialogue, suspense, and/or action	Attempts to use details and/or suspense, dialogue, and action, but with minimal effectiveness	Sensory details and examples create a sense of the characters' thoughts, actions and appearances A range of devices such as suspense, dialogue and action (gestures, expressions) advances the plot, gives insight into characters, and keeps the reader informed/ entertained. There is a good balance of showing and telling.	Sensory details and examples create a clear sense of the main characters' thoughts, actions and appearances A range of devices such as suspense, dialogue and action (gestures, expressions) skilfully advances the plot, gives insight into characters, and keeps the reader continually informed/entertained. There is an excellent balance of showing and telling.	
<b>Organisation</b>	Little to no structure: Exposition, conflict and/or resolution/ denouement may not exist	Weak structure: Exposition, sequencing of ideas in body and/or resolution/denouement need some revision May be isolated events with weak sequencing	Effective structure: Engaging exposition Logical sequencing of ideas based on purpose and linked to theme Resolution and denouement reinforce theme and give closure	Skilful Structure: Strong, engaging exposition Logical and effective sequencing of ideas based on purpose and skilfully linked to theme Resolution and denouement reinforce theme and give closure	
<b>Voice</b>	Unclear or no sense of voice, purpose and/or audience	Sense of purpose and/or audience not clear Writer's voice is detached from the story	Writer's voice is confident, authentic and entertaining Reveals the significance of the writer's attitude about the subject/memorable incident Clear sense of audience and purpose Consistent point of view	Writer's voice is authentic, clever and entertaining • Skilfully reveals the significance of the writer's attitude about the subject/ memorable incident • Clear sense of purpose and audience • Consistent point of view	

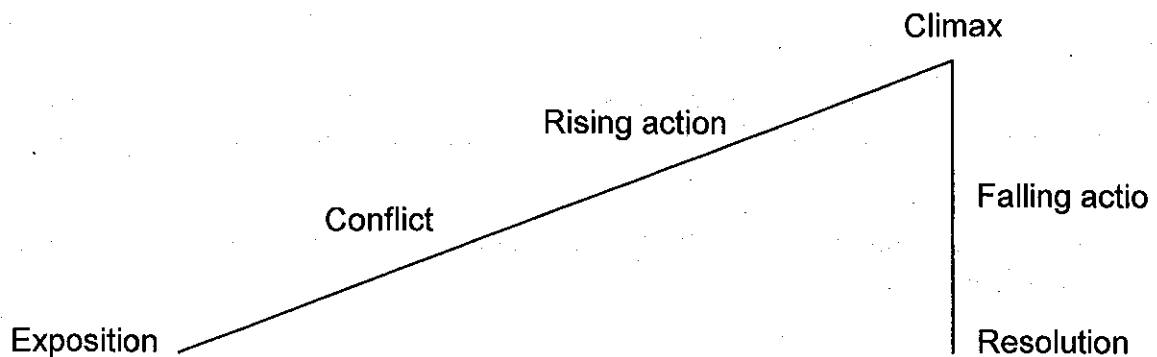
<b>Word and Language Choice</b>	Limited vocabulary; words may be used inappropriately or unnecessarily repeated	More precise and accurate words are needed to convey a clear message	Precise, detailed words or phrases get message across and reveal characters' looks, actions, feelings, reactions, and conversation • Uses academic language to enhance story	Words or phrases powerfully convey the intended message and skillfully reveal characters' looks, actions, feelings, reactions, and conversation • Academic language, imbedded throughout the text, enhances story	
<b>Writing Strategy: Sentence Fluency</b>	Little or no sense of sentence structure • Lacks transitions	• Some understanding of sentence structure • Limited use of appropriate transitions to connect sentences	• Purposeful use of sentence structure to enhance intended effect • Transitions connect ideas within and across paragraphs	• Purposeful and innovative sentence structure to enhance intended effect • Skillful use of transitions within and across paragraphs	
<b>Conventions (Spelling, Punctuation)</b>	Limited understanding of grade level appropriate conventions	Uses grade level appropriate conventions; errors occasionally obscure meaning	Uses grade level appropriate conventions; errors are minor and do not obscure meaning	Shows creativity and flexibility when using conventions to enhance meaning	

Comments:

## Elements of Short Stories

1. **Plot** – sequence of events or incidents that make up a story.
  - A. **Exposition** – designed to arouse reader's interest; background is provided.
  - B. **Conflict** – struggle between opposing forces (protagonist vs. antagonist)
    - i. **Person vs. Person** – *external* struggle between two or more individuals.
    - ii. **Person vs. themselves** – *internal* struggle concerning emotion and decision.
    - iii. **Person vs. nature** – *external* struggle between person and an element of nature or the environment.
  - C. **Rising action** – complication or development of the conflict.
  - D. **Climax** – turning point of the story; point of most intense interest.
  - E. **Falling action** – (denouement) events that lead to resolution.
  - F. **Resolution** – outcome of the conflict.

### Parts of a Typical Plot



2. **Character** – is generally the central or focal element in a story.
  - A. **Four types of characterization** – techniques the writer uses to develop a character.
    - i. Physical description.
    - ii. Speech and actions of the character.
    - iii. Direct comment from the narrator.
    - iv. Speech and other actions of other characters.
  - B. **Four types of characters** –
    - i. **Round** – complex or presented in detail.
    - ii. **Dynamic** – developing and learning in the course of the story.
    - iii. **Flat** – characterized by one or two traits.

iv. **Static** – unchanged from the story's beginning to end.

3. **Themes of literature / Analyzing characters**

- A. **Motivation** – cause of / reason for actions.
- B. **Behavior** – actions of the character.
- C. **Consequences** – results of actions.
- D. **Responsibility** – moral, legal, or mental accountability.
- E. **Expectations** – what the reader expects.

4. **Mood**

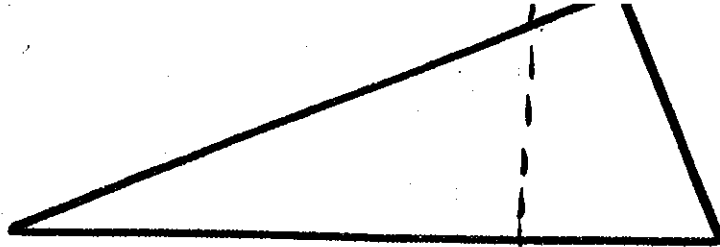
- A. **Setting** – the time and place in which the story is taking place, including factors such as weather and social customs.
- B. **Atmosphere** – the mood to feeling which pervades the story.

5. **Point of view**

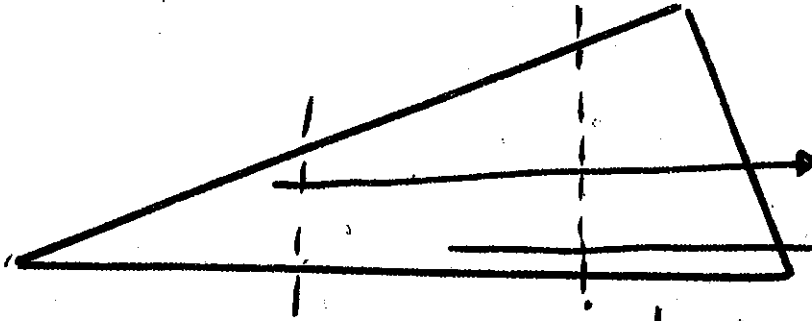
- A. **Omniscient** – the author tells the story using the third person. Author knows all of what is done, said, felt, and thought by the characters.
- B. **Limited omniscient** – author tell the story from the third person, but limits observations of thoughts and feelings to one character; the author presents the story from this character's eyes.
- C. **First person** – one character tells the story in the first person. The reader sees and knows only as much as the narrator.
- D. **Objective** – the author is like a movie camera that moves around freely recording objects. However, the author offers no comments on the characters or their actions. Readers are not told the thoughts or feelings of the characters.

6. **Figurative language**

- A. **Simile** – comparison using *like* or *as*.
- B. **Metaphor** – comparison using *is* or a form of *is*.
  - i. Implied metaphor
  - ii. Extended metaphor
- C. **Personification** – attributing humanlike qualities to inanimate things.

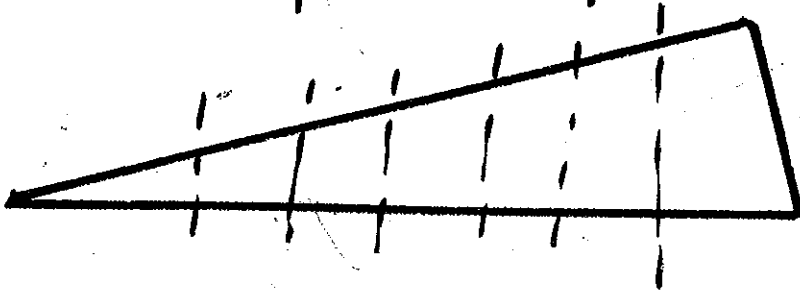


NARRATIVE + EXPOSITION



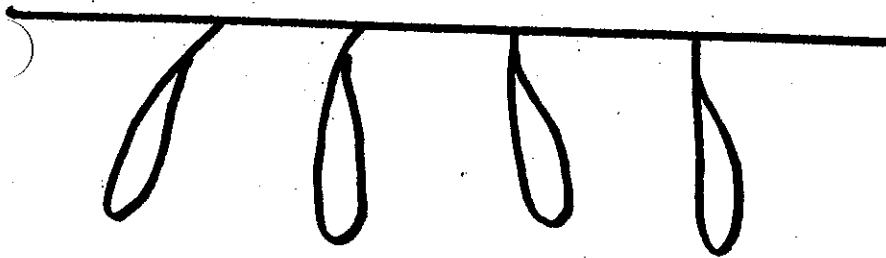
JUST BEFORE THE BIG SCENE

FLASHBACK



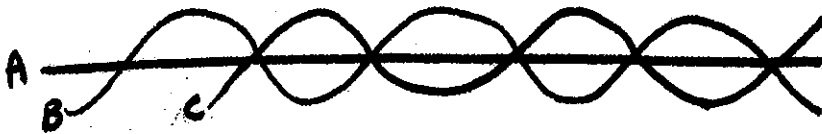
SERIES OF SCENES

chronological  
or  
not



"NOW" REMEMBERING  
VARIOUS "THENS"

NOT IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER



CONVERGING

A NUMBER OF SEPARATE  
SEQUENCES EVENTUALLY  
COINCIDE

chronology  
flashbacks  
tense